



Millions endure record cold without power; at least 15 dead

By BRYAN ANDERSON

Associated Press

OCEAN ISLE BEACH, N.C.

(AP) — A winter storm that left millions without power in record-breaking cold weather claimed more lives Tuesday, including three people found dead after a tornado hit a seaside town in North Carolina and four family members who perished in a Houston-area house fire while using a fireplace to stay warm. The storm that overwhelmed power grids and immobilized the Southern Plains carried heavy snow and freezing rain into New England and the Deep South and left behind painfully low temperatures. Wind-chill warnings extended from Canada into Mexico.

In all, at least 15 deaths were reported. Other causes included car crashes and carbon monoxide poisoning. The weather also threatened to affect the nation's COVID-19 vaccination effort. President Joe Biden's administration said delays in vaccine shipments and deliveries were likely.

North Carolina's Brunswick



THE BIG CHILL

A woman wrapped in a blanket crosses the street near downtown Dallas, Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021. Temperatures dropped into the single digits as snow shut down air travel and grocery stores.

Associated Press

County had little notice of the dangerous weather, and a tornado warning was not issued until the storm was already on the ground.

The National Weather Serv-

ice was "very surprised how rapidly this storm intensified ... and at the time of night when most people are at home and in bed, it creates a very dangerous situation," Emergency Services

Director Ed Conrow said. In Chicago, a foot and a half (46 centimeters) of new snow forced public schools to cancel in-person classes for Tuesday. Hours earlier, along the

normally balmy Gulf of Mexico, cross-country skier Sam Fagg hit fresh powder on the beach in Galveston, Texas.

Continued on next page

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A property owner videos the damage to a home from severe weather in Brunswick County, N.C. near the town of Sunset Beach, Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021.

Associated Press

Continued from Front

The worst U.S. power outages were in Texas, affecting more than 4 million homes and businesses. More than 250,000 people also lost power across parts of Appalachia, and another quarter million were without electricity following an ice storm in northwest Oregon, according to poweroutage.us, which tracks utility outage reports. Four million people lost power in Mexico.

Texas officials requested 60 generators from the Federal Emergency Management Agency and planned to prioritize hospitals and nursing homes. The state opened 35 shelters to more than 1,000 occupants, the agency said.

More than 500 people sought comfort at one shelter in Houston. Mayor Sylvester Turner said other

warming centers had to be shut down because they lost power.

Utilities from Minnesota to Texas implemented rolling blackouts to ease the burden on power grids straining to meet the extreme demand for heat and electricity.

Blackouts of more than an hour began around dawn Tuesday for Oklahoma City and more than a dozen other communities, stopping electric-powered space heaters, furnaces and lights just as temperatures hovered around minus 8 degrees.

Oklahoma Gas & Electric rescinded plans for further blackouts but urged users to set thermostats at 68 degrees Fahrenheit (20 degrees Celsius), avoid using major electric appliances and turn off lights or appliances they are not using.

Nebraska's blackouts came amid some of the coldest weather on record: In Omaha, the temperature bottomed out at 23 degrees below zero overnight (minus 30 Celsius), the coldest in 25 years.

The Southwest Power Pool, a group of utilities covering 14 states, said the blackouts were "a last resort to preserve the reliability of the electric system as a whole."

The outages forced a Texas county to scramble to administer more than 8,000 doses of Moderna's coronavirus vaccine after a public health facility lost power early Monday and its backup generator also failed, said Rafael Lemaitre, a spokesman for Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo. County officials distributed the doses at three hospitals, Rice University and the

county jail because those places had large groups of people available where they would not have to drive and with appropriate medical personnel on hand.

"It feels amazing. I'm very grateful," said Harry Golen, a college sophomore who waited for nearly four hours with his friends, much of it in the cold. He was among the last people to get the shots, which otherwise would not have reached students until March or April.

Texas officials said more than 400,000 additional doses due now will not arrive until at least Wednesday because of the storm.

The weather service's office in Wilmington, North Carolina, dispatched a team to confirm that a tornado did indeed touch down and to survey damage in Brunswick County, said Mark Willis, the office's meteorologist in charge.

Three people died and 10 were injured when the apparent tornado tore through a golf course community and another rural area just before midnight Monday, destroying dozens of homes.

Sharon Benson, 63, said her roof was damaged and her garage door blown off. Windows were shattered and nearby trees were uprooted.

"The sky lit up and there was a lot of pop-pop-popping" and thunder, she said.

Authorities in multiple states reported deaths in crashes on icy roads, including two people whose vehicle slid off a road and overturned in a waterway in Kentucky on Sunday, state police said. In Texas, three young children and their grandmother died in the Houston-area fire, which likely began while they were using a fireplace to keep warm during a power outage, a fire official said.

At least 13 children were treated for carbon monoxide poisoning at Cook Children's Medical Center in Fort Worth, the hospital said in a social media post, which warned that families were "going to extreme measures to warm their homes" with propane or diesel-burning engines and generators as well as gas ovens and stovetops. One parent died of the toxic fumes, pediatrician Phillip Scott told Fort Worth television station KTVT.

Other Texas deaths included a woman and a girl who died from suspected carbon monoxide poisoning in Houston at a home without electricity from a car left running in an attached garage, and two men found along Houston-area roadways who likely died in sub-freezing temperatures, law enforcement officials said. In west Tennessee, a 10-year-old boy died after falling into an ice-covered pond on Sunday during a winter storm, fire officials said.

Several cities had record lows: In Minnesota, the Hibbing/Chisholm weather station registered minus 38 degrees Fahrenheit (minus 39 degrees Celsius). Sioux Falls, South Dakota, dropped to minus 26 Fahrenheit (minus 26 degrees Celsius).

Air travel was also affected. At midday, more than 2,700 U.S. flights had been canceled, led by more than 800 at Dallas Fort Worth International Airport and more than 700 at Bush Intercontinental in Houston. Authorities pleaded with residents to stay home Tuesday. About 100 school systems closed, delayed opening or switched to remote classes in Alabama, where forecasters said conditions might not improve until temperatures rise above freezing Wednesday afternoon. □

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Dem's lawsuit accuses Trump of inciting deadly Capitol riot

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House Homeland Security chairman accused Donald Trump in a federal lawsuit Tuesday of inciting the deadly insurrection at the U.S. Capitol and conspiring with his lawyer and extremist groups to try to prevent Congress from certifying the results of the presidential election he lost to Joe Biden.

The lawsuit from Democratic Rep. Bennie Thompson is part of an expected wave of litigation over the Jan. 6 riot and is believed to be the first filed by a member of Congress. It seeks unspecified punitive and compensatory damages. It also names as defendants Rudy Giuliani, Trump's personal lawyer, and the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers, extremist organizations that have had members charged by the Justice Department with taking part in the siege.

"All I wanted to do was do my job, and the insurrection that occurred prevented me from doing that," Thompson, D-Miss., told reporters Tuesday as he recounted his harrowing experiences as Trump loyalists broke into the Capitol and disrupted the constitutionally mandated process of certifying the election.

A Trump adviser, Jason Miller, said in a statement that Trump did not organize the rally that preceded the riot and "did not incite or conspire to incite any violence at the Capitol on Jan. 6th." A lawyer for Giuliani did not immediately return an email seeking comment.

The suit, filed in federal court in Washington under a Reconstruction-era



In this Sept. 17, 2020 file photo, Committee Chairman Rep. Bennie Thompson, D-Miss., speaks during a House Committee on Homeland Security hearing on 'worldwide threats to the homeland', on Capitol Hill Washington.

Associated Press

law called the Ku Klux Klan Act, comes three days after Trump was acquitted in a Senate impeachment trial that centered on allegations that he incited the riot, in which five people died. That acquittal is likely to open the door to fresh legal scrutiny over Trump's actions before and during the siege. Additional suits could be brought by other members of Congress or by law enforcement officers injured while responding to the riot.

Even some Republicans who voted to acquit Trump on Saturday acknowledged that the more proper venue to deal with Trump was in the courts, especially now that he has left the White House and lost certain legal protections that shielded him as president.

The suit traces the drawn-out effort by Trump and Giuliani to cast doubt on the election results even though courts across the country and state election officials repeatedly rejected their baseless allegations of fraud. Despite evidence to the contrary, the suit says, the men portrayed the election as stolen while Trump "endorsed rather than discouraged" threats of violence from his angry supporters in the weeks leading up to the assault on the Capitol.

"The carefully orchestrated series of events that unfolded at the Save America rally and the storming of the Capitol was no accident or coincidence," the suit says. "It was the intended and foreseeable culmination of a carefully coordinated

campaign to interfere with the legal process required to confirm the tally of votes cast in the Electoral College."

Presidents are historically afforded broad immunity from lawsuits for actions they take in their role as commander in chief. But the lawsuit filed Tuesday was brought against Trump in his personal, not official, capacity and alleges that none of the behavior at issue had to do with his responsibilities as president.

"Inciting a riot, or attempting to interfere with the congressional efforts to ratify the results of the election that are commended by the Constitution, could not conceivably be within the scope of ordinary responsibilities of the president," Joseph Sellers, a lawyer who

represents Thompson, said in an interview.

"In this respect, because of his conduct, he is just like any other private citizen," he said.

Sellers, a lawyer with the Washington law firm of Cohen Milstein, filed the case along with the NAACP. Several other members of Congress are expected to join.

White House press secretary Jen Psaki told reporters Tuesday that Biden supports the rights of individuals "to take steps through the judicial process," but she declined to comment further.

Though the impeachment case focused squarely on accusations of incitement, the lawsuit more broadly accuses Trump of conspiring to disrupt the constitutional activities of Congress — namely, the certification of election results establishing Biden as the rightful winner — through a monthslong effort to discredit the outcome and to lean on individual states and his own vice president to overturn the contest.

The case against Trump was brought under a provision of the Ku Klux Klan Act of 1871, which was passed in response to KKK violence and prohibits violence or intimidation meant to prevent Congress or other federal officials from carrying out their constitutional duties.

"Fortunately, this hasn't been used very much," Sellers said. "But what we see here is so unprecedented that it's really reminiscent of what gave rise to the enactment of this legislation right after the Civil War." □

Audit: FEMA paid for unused rooms for 2017 disaster victims

WASHINGTON (AP) — An audit has found that the Federal Emergency Management Agency paid for unused hotel rooms and may have overpaid room taxes as it provided emergency shelter to thousands of disaster victims in 2017.

The audit released Tuesday by the Office of Inspector General for the Department of Homeland Security examined a program that

spent about \$642 million to provide emergency lodging for nearly 227,000 victims of hurricanes in Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, Florida and Texas and wildfires in California.

It found that a FEMA contractor did not adequately itemize hotel room taxes and in some cases the hotels appeared to have charged more than the established rate. As a result, the audit could not deter-

mine the accuracy of nearly \$56 million in hotel taxes.

It found that FEMA didn't require disaster victims to notify the agency when they checked out of the hotels but sometimes the bills were still paid. As a result, it found, that FEMA "is uncertain about the true magnitude of unnecessary payments for unoccupied hotel rooms" during the period.

The report also faulted FEMA for

not dedicating enough staff to help people find permanent housing. That led to more than 26,700 disaster victims staying in hotels longer than the recommended six months.

FEMA told the Inspector General that it is working to address the issues raised by its report, including by dedicating a new unit to oversee the temporary shelter program. □

Case dropped after woman in racist NYC run-in gets therapy

By **MICHAEL R. SISAK**

NEW YORK (AP) — Amy Cooper, the white woman arrested last year for calling 911 on a Black birdwatcher in New York's Central Park, had her criminal case thrown out Tuesday after completing a diversionary counseling program that prosecutors said was meant to educate her on the harm of her actions. Assistant District Attorney Joan Illuzzi-Orbon said Manhattan prosecutors were satisfied with Cooper's participation in the program — described as an alternative, restorative justice solution — and were not seeking to pursue the case any further. Such outcomes are standard for first-time offenders facing misdemeanor charges, Illuzzi said.

Judge Anne Swern, presiding over the matter by video because of the coronavirus pandemic, agreed to dismiss the charge of filing a false police report and said she would seal Cooper's case file, in accordance with state law. The confrontation, captured on video the same day Minneapolis police killed George Floyd, drew worldwide attention and was seen by many as a stark example of everyday racism. Christian Cooper, the birdwatcher who recorded the



This May 25, 2020 file image, taken from video provided by Christian Cooper, shows Amy Cooper with her dog calling police at Central Park in New York.

video and was the subject of Amy Cooper's 911 call, said he was caught off guard and learned off the dismissal only when The Associated Press called him shortly thereafter. Illuzzi said he declined to participate in the matter. There is no relation between Christian Cooper and Amy Cooper. Christian Cooper later issued a statement highlighting what he said was another racial injustice, saying he was "far more outraged" by the U.S. Congress denying statehood to the mostly

non-white District of Columbia "than by anything Amy Cooper did." "That gross racial injustice could be fixed by Congress now, today, and that's what people should be focused on — not last year's events in Central Park," Christian Cooper said. Amy Cooper's lawyer, Robert Barnes, praised prosecutors for a "thorough and honest inquiry" into the allegations and said he agreed with the decision to dismiss the case. "We thank them for their

integrity, and agree with the outcome," Barnes said. "Many others rushed to the wrong conclusion based on inadequate investigation, and for some, there may be legal consequences coming." Amy Cooper, 41, drew widespread condemnation and was fired from her job as a portfolio manager at investment firm Franklin Templeton after frantically calling 911 on May 25 to claim she was being threatened by "an African American man" who had

confronted her for walking her dog without a leash. When police called Amy Cooper back in an attempt to locate her in the park, she falsely claimed the man, Christian Cooper, had "tried to assault her," Illuzzi said. The second call was not recorded on video, Illuzzi said. It was previously reported incorrectly that Cooper was the one who called 911 again. Illuzzi said that when officers arrived, Christian Cooper was gone and Amy Cooper admitted he hadn't tried to assault her. Illuzzi said Amy Cooper's false claim could have led to a physical confrontation between police and Christian Cooper if they had gotten to him first.

"The simple principle is: One can not use the police to threaten another and, in this case, in a racially offensive and charged manner," Illuzzi said.

Amy Cooper's diversionary program included education about racial equality and five therapy sessions focused on making her appreciate that racial identities shape our lives, but that they shouldn't be used to cause harm, Illuzzi said. The prosecutor said Amy Cooper's therapist described it as a "moving experience" and that she learned "a lot in their sessions together." □

Associated Press

Captain pleads not guilty to manslaughter in boat fire



In this Sept. 12, 2019, file photo, the burned hull of the dive boat Conception is brought to the surface by a salvage team off Santa Cruz Island, Calif.

Associated Press

By **STEFANIE DAZIO and BRIAN MELLEY**
LOS ANGELES (AP) — The

captain of a scuba diving boat that burned and sank off the California coast, kill-

ing 34 people, pleaded not guilty Tuesday to manslaughter charges. Jerry Boylan was arraigned in federal court in Los Angeles on 34 counts of seaman's manslaughter. Each count carries a potential 10-year prison term. Prosecutors say Boylan failed to follow safety rules before the fire broke out Sept. 2, 2019, on the Conception and led to one of the deadliest maritime disasters in recent U.S. history. Boylan was accused of "misconduct, negligence and inattention" by failing to train his crew, conduct fire drills and have a roving night watchman on the

boat when the fire ignited. The rare federal charges against Boylan were brought under a pre-Civil War law designed to hold steamboat captains and crew responsible for maritime disasters that were much more frequent at the time. Boylan and four other crew members, who had all been sleeping, escaped from the fiery boat after the captain made a panicked mayday call. All 33 passengers and one crew member died in the bunkroom below deck, some wearing shoes that led to speculation they were trying to escape.

Officials said they were trapped by flames that blocked a stairwell and a small hatch that were the only exits. All died of smoke inhalation, according to coroner's reports. Federal safety investigators blamed the owners of the vessel, Truth Aquatics Inc., for a lack of oversight, though they have not been charged with a crime. Truth Aquatics has sued in federal court under a provision in maritime law to avoid payouts to the families of the victims. The families of 32 victims have filed claims against boat owners Glen and Dana Fritzler and the company. □

France passes anti-radicalism bill that worries Muslims

By **ELAINE GANLEY**

Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Lawmakers overwhelmingly approved on Tuesday a bill that would strengthen oversight of mosques, schools and sports clubs to safeguard France from radical Islamists and ensure respect for French values — one of President Emmanuel Macron's landmark projects. The vote in the lower house was the first critical hurdle for the legislation that has been long in the making after two weeks of intense debate. The bill passed 347 to 151 with 65 abstentions. The wide-ranging bill that covers most aspects of French life has been hotly contested by some Muslims, lawmakers and others who fear the state is intruding on essential freedoms and pointing a finger at Islam, the nation's No. 2 religion. But it breezed through a chamber in which Macron's centrist party has a majority. The legislation gained added urgency after a teacher was beheaded in October followed by a deadly attack on a basilica in Nice.



Shoppers who belong to the Muslim community wearing face masks as a precaution against the coronavirus walk at the Belleville open market in Paris, Tuesday, Feb. 9, 2021.

Associated Press

The bill known as Art. 18 is known as the "Paty law," named after Samuel Paty, the teacher beheaded outside his school west of Paris. The legislation makes it a crime to endanger the life of a person by providing details of their private life and location. Paty was slain after information about

his school was posted in a video. The bill bolsters other French efforts to fight extremism, mainly security-based. Detractors say the measures are already covered in current laws and voice suspicions the bill has a hidden agenda by a government looking to entice right-wing voters ahead of

presidential elections next year. Just days before Tuesday's vote, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin - the bill's main sponsor - accused far-right leader Marine Le Pen during nationally televised debate of being "soft" on radical Islam and that she needed to take vitamins. The remark intended to

underscore that the ruling party is tougher than the far-right in tackling radical Islamists. But Le Pen criticizes the bill as too weak and has offered what she called her own, tougher counter-proposal. Le Pen, who has declared her candidacy for the 2022 election, lost in the 2017 runoff against Macron. The bill — which mentions neither Muslims nor Islam by name — is backed by those who see the need to contain what the government says is an encroaching fundamentalism subverting French values, notably the nation's foundational value of secularism and gender equality. The planned law "supporting respect for the principles of the Republic" is dubbed the "separatism" bill, a term used by Macron to refer to radicals who would create a "counter society" in France. Top representatives of all religions were consulted as the text was being written. The government's leading Muslim conduit, the French Council for the Muslim Faith, gave its backing. □

Dutch gov't appeals court order to scrap coronavirus curfew

By **MIKE CORDER**

Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — A Dutch court ordered Tuesday to end the curfew it imposed last month to rein in the spread of the

coronavirus, saying the ruling coalition was not entitled to use emergency powers to enforce the restrictive measure. The government of the Netherlands immediately appealed and asked the

court to suspend the order prohibiting the curfew. A hearing into the request to suspend the order was halted after just a few minutes when a member of the group that sought to overturn the curfew accused the presiding judge of bias. The full appeal hearing was scheduled for Friday. Prime Minister Mark Rutte urged the public to continue staying home during the 9 p.m. to 4:30 a.m. curfew hours pending the result of the appeal, saying the curfew "is a means, not an end." "It is really very important that we limit our social contacts as much as possible because of the risk of transmission of the virus," he added. "So please do that. Do it for yourself, but also for each other."

In a written statement, The Hague District Court called the curfew a "far-reaching violation of the right to freedom of movement and privacy" that also indirectly curtails the rights of freedom of assembly and demonstration. "This requires a very careful decision-making process," a single judge at the court ruled in the summary proceeding. Last week, the government extended the curfew into March by using a law allowing it to bypass the usual legislative process in emergencies. When the curfew was introduced and when it was extended, the government sought and gained support from the majority of lawmakers during two debates in the lower house of Dutch parliament, but it did not sub-

mit legislation for a formal vote. However, the court said the introduction of the curfew was not an emergency requiring the use of the fast-track process as it had been discussed at length during the coronavirus crisis. A group called Viruwaarheid, or Virus Truth, that is deeply skeptical of the government's approach to slowing the spread of the virus had asked the court to outlaw the curfew, which sparked rioting in the first days of its imposition but is widely adhered to by the vast majority of the country. In a video interview tweeted by the group, its leader, Willem Engel thanked the judge who issued the ruling and said, "I'm happy that there is still such a thing as jurisprudence." □



Near-empty streets are seen in the normally bustling Red Light District in Amsterdam, Netherlands, Thursday, Feb. 4, 2021.

Associated Press

Myanmar's Suu Kyi faces new charge as crackdown intensifies

YANGON, Myanmar (AP) —

Police in Myanmar filed a new charge against ousted leader Aung San Suu Kyi, her lawyer said Tuesday, in a move that may allow her to be held indefinitely without trial as part of an intensifying crackdown by authorities who seized power in a coup.

Suu Kyi, who was deposed and detained in the military takeover on Feb. 1, already faced a charge of illegally possessing walkie-talkies — an apparent attempt to provide a legal veneer for her house arrest. Under the new charge, she is accused of breaking a law that has been used to prosecute people who have violated coronavirus restrictions, lawyer Khin Maung Zaw told reporters after meeting with a judge in a court in the capital, Naypyitaw.

It carries a maximum punishment of three years in prison. But, perhaps more worryingly, because of changes to the Penal Code instituted by the junta last week, it could allow her to be detained indefinitely, even without a court's permission. Suu Kyi's lawyer told reporters he has not seen her since her arrest and only arrived after an unexpected videoconference the judge said had been held with her.

The legal maneuver comes two weeks after the military seized power in a coup that shocked many in the international community who had been hopeful that Myanmar was taking



Demonstrators, with eyes blindfolded, lie down in the street to protest a military coup in Yangon, Myanmar, Tuesday, Feb. 16, 2021.

steps toward democracy. Since then, the junta has ratcheted up the pressure on protesters resisting the takeover, including violently breaking up some demonstrations and blocking internet access.

On Monday, security forces pointed guns at a group of 1,000 demonstrators and attacked them with slingshots and sticks in the city of Mandalay. Local media reported that police also fired rubber bullets into a crowd and that a few people were injured.

Protests continued Tuesday in Yangon, the country's largest city, and elsewhere. In Yangon, police blocked off the street in front of the Central Bank, which protesters have targeted amid speculation online that the

military is seeking to seize money from it. Buddhist monks demonstrated outside the U.N.'s local office in the city.

The protests are taking place in defiance of an order banning gatherings of five or more people. But the security presence was low-key around the march after Monday's confrontations. State media have been acknowledging the protest movement only indirectly. The Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper reported about a meeting of the State Administration Council, the new top governing body, and quoted its chief, Senior Gen. Min Aung Hlaing, saying the authorities "are handling the ongoing problems with care." It said the council dis-

cussed taking legal action against protesters and providing "true information" to the media. On Sunday and Monday nights, the military ordered an internet blackout almost entirely blocking online access. Once before in recent weeks it imposed a similar blackout and has also tried less successfully to block social media platforms. It has also prepared a draft law that would criminalize many online activities.

While the military did not say why the internet was blocked, there is widespread speculation that the government is installing a firewall system to allow it to monitor or block most or all online activity.

The Global New Light of Myanmar newspaper

also reported that council members discussed acting against a "parallel government" established by some elected lawmakers of Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy party, who were prevented from taking their seats when the military stopped Parliament from opening its session Feb. 1.

In the days following the takeover, members of Suu Kyi's party formed a committee, declaring themselves the true representatives of Myanmar's people and asking for international recognition. No such recognition has come, even as the United States and other governments have condemned the coup and urged the military to return power to the elected government and release Suu Kyi and other detainees.

Neighboring China, meanwhile, has so far not condemned the takeover. Some protesters have accused Beijing which has long been Myanmar's main arms supplier and has major investments in the country of propping up the junta.

China's ambassador to the Southeast Asian country responded to those accusations, noting that Beijing has friendly relations with both Suu Kyi's party and the military, according to the text of an interview posted on the embassy's Facebook page Tuesday. Chen Hai said he wished the two sides could solve their differences through dialogue. □

Associated Press

Israel's New Hope party to review ties with Lincoln Project

JERUSALEM (AP) — A leading challenger to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in elections next month said Tuesday that he is reviewing his ties with the founders of the Lincoln Project — a Republican group that opposed former President Donald Trump and whose leadership has been engulfed in a sexual harassment scandal. Israel's New Hope

party, headed by Netanyahu's former Likud party rival Gideon Saar, hired several consultants from the Lincoln Project in January as campaign advisers in Israel's upcoming parliamentary election.

Last week, revelations surfaced that the Lincoln Project knew about allegations of sexual harassment involving John Weaver, one of its co-founders,

several months before acknowledging them publicly.

New Hope said that it had never worked directly with the Lincoln Project or Weaver, rather it had engaged four consultants from the organization: co-founders Steve Schmidt, Rick Wilson, Stuart Stevens and Reed Galen. Schmidt resigned from the Lincoln Project last week.

"In any event, due to financial considerations, the contract with the consultants is under review, and in the coming days, we will examine the possibility of further cooperation," the party said.

Saar's New Hope party, a hard-line nationalist faction made up mostly of former Netanyahu allies, seeks to unseat the longtime prime minister in the March 23

vote, Israel's fourth parliamentary election in four years. Saar charges that Likud has become the party of Netanyahu and has lost direction.

Recent public opinion polls give Saar a projected 13 seats in the 120-seat Knesset, Israel's parliament, enough to pose an obstacle to Netanyahu's formation of a stable governing coalition. □

Volunteer paramedics patrol streets of Venezuela's capital

By SCOTT SMITH

Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP)

— Venezuela's deepening crisis has gutted emergency ambulance services, so a group of volunteer paramedics has stepped into the void to offer life-saving help on the tough streets of Caracas. Calling themselves Angels of the Road, the volunteer corps relies on donated medical supplies and funding from international organizations. Despite receiving no paychecks, its roughly 40 paramedics are ready at a moment's notice to jump onto motorcycles and fire up their single ambulance and race into the streets. Jonathan Quantip, 44, said he and co-founder Zuly Rodiz launched the project two years ago after watching their native Venezuela precipitously decline over years of political and social crisis. "We Venezuelans have to solve our own country's problems," Quantip said. "We have to use the skills we're each good at."

The group works on a shoe-



Wearing masks to curb the spread of the new coronavirus, Angels of the Road volunteer paramedics take a boy on a stretcher to their ambulance after he was involved in a motorcycle accident in Caracas, Venezuela, Thursday, Feb. 4, 2021.

string budget with nothing left over for wages, so each paramedic relies on another source of income. Some donate their off-time after working in hospitals and firehouses. Others flip burgers in fast-food restaurants. The paramedics say they feed off the adrenaline of

each emergency call to a chaotic crash scene or shooting in an underserved barrio. Simple gestures of gratitude also motivate them, said 21-year-old paramedic Laura Lara. "It's helping people and hearing them say 'thank you' after hanging on de-

spite their pain and suffering," Lara said. "All that emotion is what makes you fall in love with this." Venezuela was once a wealthy oil nation, but years of political crisis has left it in ruins. Most residents don't have reliable running water and electricity

at home. The crisis has sent more than 5 million fleeing in a migration rivaling that of war-torn Syria.

Venezuela's hospitals lack basic medicine and trained personnel and there aren't enough ambulances in service to meet the needs of its population, said Quantip, adding that no other volunteer paramedic organizations like this exist in Venezuela. Some state services exist, but they are unreliable and often don't have adequate medical supplies, while private companies are more expensive than most Venezuelans can afford. Staffers for Angels of the Road work in rented office space at a national newspaper that no longer prints a paper edition. They keep a constant ear on walkie-talkie radio traffic and scan online chats dedicated to emergency services. Sometimes, colleagues in the public sector ambulance and fire services need help and call them for backup, they said, noting a recent call from a firehouse with a truck that had no gasoline. □

Associated Press

U.S. urges Yemen's rebels to halt attack on central province

By SAMY MAGDY

Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — The U.S. on Tuesday urged Yemen's Houthi rebels to halt their attack on the central province of Marib, warning against exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the Arab world's poorest country. State Department spokesperson Ned Price said in a statement the Houthis' attack on Marib, which is held by the rival internationally recognized government, was "the action of a group not committed to peace or to ending the war afflicting the people of Yemen." The State Department's comments came the same day that the revocation of the Houthis' status as a terrorist group took effect. The move by President Joe Biden's administration was welcomed by the U.N. and aid groups who feared former president Donald Trump's actions would impede aid deliveries to the country.

Yemen's war started in 2014 when the Iran-backed Houthis seized the capital, Sanaa, and much of the country's north. A Saudi-led, U.S.-backed coalition intervened months later to dislodge the rebels and restore the internationally recognized government. The conflict has killed some 130,000 people and spawned the world's worst humanitarian disaster. □

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DCNA produces Natural Disaster Response Manual for Dutch Caribbean protected areas



PIC 3 (turtle): Photo by Brenda Kirkby

KRALENDIJK, BONAIRE — The Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance (DCNA) recently released its Disaster Risk Mitigation Manual to be used by the Park Management Organizations to lessen the impacts of weather-related disasters on nature protected areas. The Manual, developed by contractors Nature2 and Parks Work, is a result of the experiences had by the Park Management Organizations on Saba, St. Eustatius and St. Maarten during the disastrous 2017 Hurricane Season.

This Natural Disaster Response Manual was produced for the Dutch Caribbean islands of Saba, St. Eustatius and St. Maarten after those islands were heavily impacted by Hurricanes Irma and Maria in 2017. The manual is heavily based on the experiences of the Park Management Organizations the Sint Maarten Nature Foundation (NFSXM), the Saba Conservation Foundation (SCF) and STENAPA St. Eustatius and aims to give the tools necessary to effectively respond to natural disasters in terms of preparation, response and restoration. The funding for the manual is part of the emergency financial support given to the NFSXM, SCF and STENAPA by the DCNA Trust Fund as a response to the 2017 Hurricane Season.

The Manual provides guidance on how to deal effectively with hurricanes and severe weather events from a natural resource management perspective. The need for response protocols for similar events, such as sargassum influx and pandemics, was identified by managers and space has been left for such additional protocols to be included. The Manual acts as a tool to assist park managers and staff with disaster



management, preparation, response and recovery. The content includes details on planning and preparing for a severe weather event, assessing the impact on natural resources and how to deal with response, recovery and restoration.

"This manual will greatly increase the response capacity of the NFSXM, the SCF and STENAPA St. Eustatius to respond to natural disasters. Even from my own personal experience before, during and after the passage of Hurricane Irma and Maria and the way the Nature Foundation responded this is a critical tool for ensuring adequate, safe and structured response, also in terms of giving the financial and capacity support necessary to the organizations in the aftermath of a major storm," commented former Manager of the Sint Maarten Nature Foundation and current Director of the Dutch Caribbean Nature Alliance Tadzio Bervoets.

About DCNA

DCNA is a non-profit organisation created to protect the natural environment and to promote sustainable management of natural resources on the six Dutch Caribbean islands. The Dutch Caribbean consists of the Windward Islands of St. Maarten, Saba, St. Eustatius and the

Leeward Islands of Aruba, Bonaire and Curaçao. The pristine nature of the Dutch Caribbean contains the richest biodiversity in the Kingdom of the Netherlands. The diverse ecosystems are a magnet for tourism and at the same time the most important source of income for the islanders. Nature on the islands is unique and important but it is also fragile. The lack of sustainable funding, policy support and adequate spatial planning pose the most significant threats.

DCNA's mission is to safeguard nature in the Dutch Caribbean by helping and assisting the Protected Area Management Organizations -Aruba National Parks Foundation, STINAPA Bonaire, CARMABI Curaçao, STENAPA St. Eustatius, the Saba Conservation Foundation and the Sint Maarten Nature Foundation. DCNA's goals are: (1) Support and assist the Protected Area Management Organizations to secure sustainable sources of funding for nature conservation (2) Promote and facilitate permanent dialogue, knowledge exchange, training and cooperation between the Protected Area Management Organizations and to strengthen their nature management activities. (3) Promote and represent nature conservation in the Dutch Caribbean, nationally and internationally. (4) Provide online access to information related to biodiversity and conservation management and encourage information exchange. (5) Promote educational outreach and public awareness.

Check DCNA's Dutch Caribbean Natural Disaster Response Manual: <https://www.dcnanature.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/DCNA-DisasterManual.pdf>.



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Happy Island Miracles in pictures & words

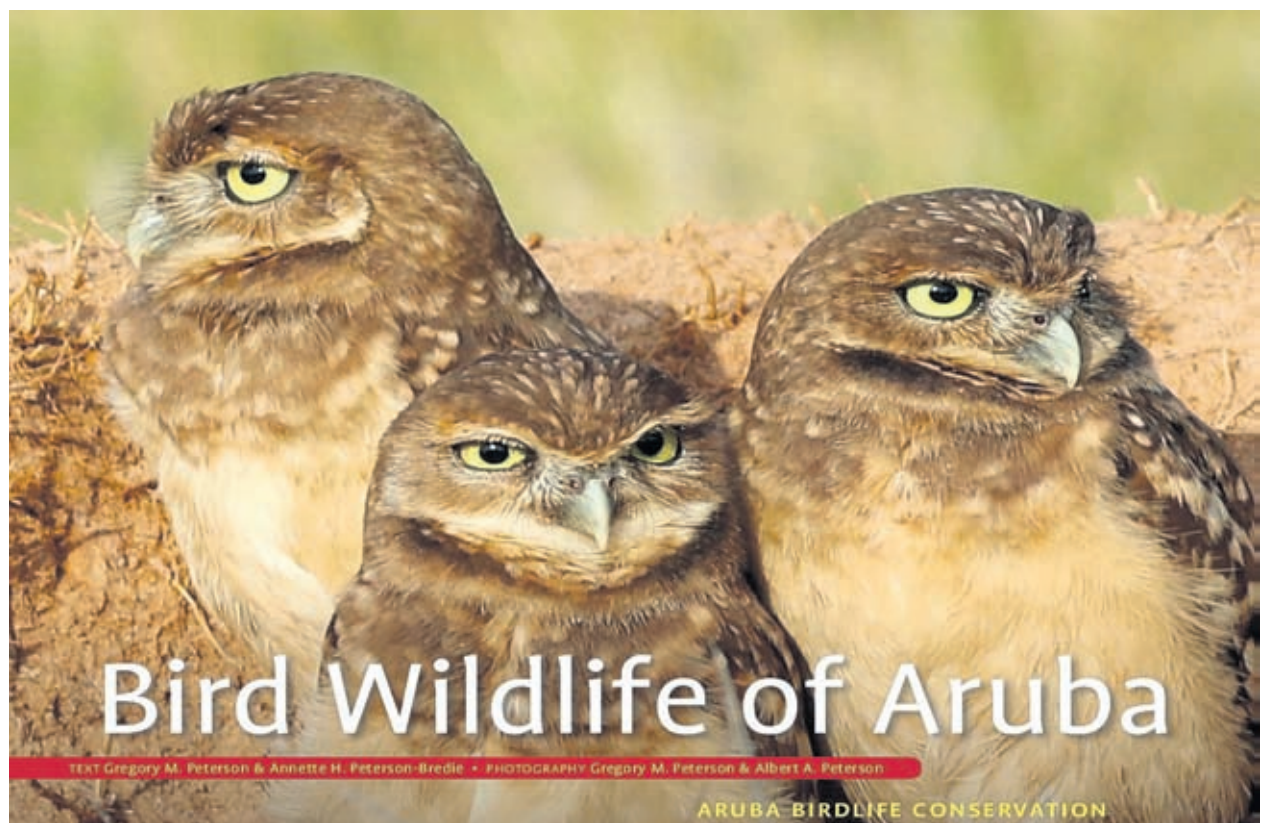
ORANJESTAD - Books, they can shake your world upside down. A good book is changing your mood like that perfect vacation spot that energizes your spirit. Take these two together and what you get is a vacation book, a memory of that wonderful, heavenly place where you spent your valuable leisure time. Aruba Today happily created a small selection of Happy Island Miracles in pictures and words.

Aruba Point to Point by Federico Cabello

Beautiful pictures of Aruba, this is a perfect coffee table book to dream away with. The book has 192 full color pages and more than 400 photos in a landscape format of 9.1 x 6.6 x 1.1 inches. In the words of the author: "Slipping beyond a dynamic tourist industry to discover its wild and undeveloped beauty. Starting at the extreme north of the island, at California Lighthouse, I travel south along pristine beaches of white sand and calm, translucent seas, passing hotels, sailboats and shipwrecks as I go. At the southern tip, it is hard not to wish that the island would never end. Then back up the rocky East coast, where time and the eternal embrace of the waves have opened secret bays and stunning beaches in the shelter of rock walls. From beach to beach, point to point, cave to cliff to boat to bird, Aruba truly is... One Happy Island."

Bird Wildlife of Aruba Hardcover by Greg Peterson

Popular book that gives an overview of Aruba's birds together with descriptions. The book contains full page photographs of over two hundred species of birds taken in Aruba's wildlife. A checklist, for scientific and educational purposes, is at the end of the book containing the names of all bird species that can be found



in Aruba. Where possible, the status (resident, migrant, and vagrant, introduced) and abundance (common, fairly common, uncommon, scarce, and rare) of the particular bird species will be added to the checklist.

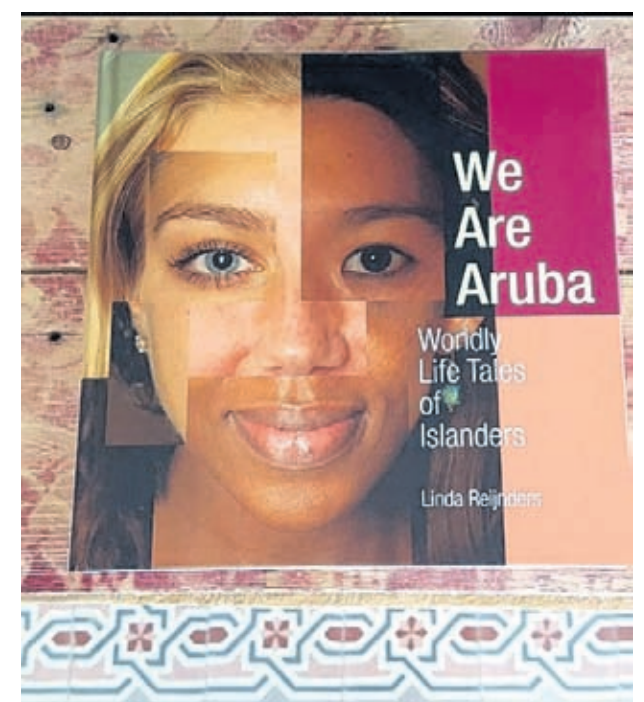
Island Life, Aruba's Best-Kept Diary by Rona Coster

The book is a selection of columns written by Rona Coster between 1992 and 2004. The column appeared for the first time under the title Island Life in 1992 in The News, a local English-language newspaper. The Island Life columns were very factual and had a very strong educational undertone. Marking its 25th anniversary the column has become part of Aruba's history and collective memory. "For those who were part of history to remember those days and for the next generations and Aruba's visitors to learn about our islands valuable traditions, movements and contributors", quoted by Karin Swiers, the book's editor and publisher, at VisitAruba.com.

We Are Aruba by Linda Reijnders

Worldly life tales of islanders that come from 76 different countries. This is a book that tells the stories of immigrants who make up for the multi-

cultural society that Aruba is. A world within an island, a cocktail of people. The book is visibly enriched with a picture of each interviewed immigrant and an image of her/his country as well as a map with the country's location. In the back you will find a list with all nationalities living in the island and their numbers. □



The Kitchen Table enters sixth year of gastronomic success on NEW location: A very fine culinary journey of Caribbean and Peruvian fusion cuisine

EAGLE BEACH — The Kitchen Table is an elegant, classy, intimate, high-quality restaurant with an exceptional dining set-up. Dining here is an experience, a kind of sitting- at your- best- friend's or family's kitchen table where you feel and taste that the food contains love. Are you looking for something different, an ecstatic foody trip, than this is where you need to go.

The 7-8 course gastronomic journey will start with sparkling wine at the patio of The Kitchen Table's new location at Paradise Beach Villas as of 6.45PM. Around 7.00PM guests will be guided for a memorable dinner on the second floor of the other popular restaurant Asi Es Mi Peru. The dining concept reflects extraordinary, elegant and exquisite dishes from the Caribbean, Peruvian fusion and international cuisine created by the owners, Chef

David Lizano and his team. To pair the perfect wines three sommeliers were invited to make the selection. The interior of the restaurant is if you were in an elegant establishment in Lima, the capital city of Peru. You feel elevated in the top of the building where dinner takes place in an intimate setting. The typical, colorful Peruvian fabrics dress the ceiling while the large windows dignify the room. There are only 16 seats available creating an intimacy underlined by the owner's personal attention. "This is an amazing experience," says Robert J. Giordanella from New York. "The food is truly divine," shares a local guest. An evening at The Kitchen Table will be noted as unforgettable in your book of vacation memories, as it stands out from the regular island dinners.

It is all about consistency
The Peruvian-born Roxanna Salinas



nas and her husband Jan van Nes are the secret formula behind The Kitchen Table's success. The couple takes a personal approach to what they do, this is not about running a business as usual. This is more about making you feel welcomed home, as well as being pampered. They bring top hospitality, experience and authenticity to the table. Within this gourmet dinner concept the two blended the Peruvian culinary art of Roxanna's top kitchen team and Jan's expertise from The Kitchen Table. The result is one big trip of delight, indulge and tickling of your taste buds. The Kitchen Table welcomes you with open arms every Tuesday to Saturday.

Peruvian touch
In the last ten years, Peru has been recognized as one of the world's

best culinary destinations, and for seven consecutive years, the South American country has won the award for the Best Culinary destination at the Worlds Travel Awards. Biodiversity combined multiculturalism are the reasons why Peru is so rich in gastronomy. You can travel through the last 500 years, touch a mix of cultures whenever you taste authentic Peruvian cuisine. The Kitchen Table brings this epicurean delicacies to Aruba paired perfectly with the best wines and they will make you understand why Peru is at the height of today's gastronomy.

The Kitchen Table is open from Tuesday to Saturday. Have a peak on their website www.thekitchentableinaruba.com or call them at +297-280 7117. □



Cost of a single Bitcoin exceeds \$50,000 for first time



The Bitcoin logo appears on the display screen of a crypto currency ATM at the Smoker's Choice store, Tuesday, Feb. 9, 2021, in Salem, N.H.

By **MATT OTT**
AP Business Writer

SILVER SPRING, Md. (AP) — The seemingly unstoppable rise of Bitcoin continued Tuesday with the cost of a single unit of the digital currency rising above \$50,000 for the first time.

The price of Bitcoin has risen almost 200% in the last three months and its volatility was on display Tuesday. After rising above \$50,600, it fell back to \$48,674 at 2:15 p.m. ET. At that price, with about 18.6 million Bitcoins in circulation, Bitcoin has a market value of nearly \$907 billion. Bitcoin is rallying as more companies signal the digital currency could eventually gain widespread acceptance as a means of payment. The vast majority of those who have acquired Bitcoin have treated it as a commodity, like gold, with few places accepting it in exchange for goods or services. Companies have been leery because of Bitcoin's volatility and its use by parties who want to avoid the traditional banking system for a myriad of reasons.

Last week, however, the electric car company Tesla sent a tremor through the digital currency markets, saying that it was buying \$1.5

billion in Bitcoin as part of a new investment strategy, and that it would soon be accepting Bitcoin as payment for its cars.

BNY Mellon, the oldest bank in the U.S., followed a day later, saying it would include digital currencies in the services it provides to clients. Mastercard said it would start supporting "select crypto currencies" on its network. And Blue Ridge Bank of Charlottesville, Virginia, said it would allow cardholders to purchase and redeem Bitcoin at 19 of its ATMs.

As its price keeps rising, here's a brief look at the bitcoin frenzy:

HOW BITCOINS WORK

Bitcoin is a digital currency that is not tied to a bank or government and allows users to spend money anonymously. The coins are created by users who "mine" them by lending computing power to verify other users' transactions. They receive bitcoins in exchange. The coins also can be bought and sold on exchanges with U.S. dollars and other currencies. Some businesses also accept bitcoin, but its popularity has stalled out in recent years.

AM I ABLE TO USE BITCOIN TO BUY STUFF?

The digital currency has become

popular enough that more than 300,000 transactions typically occur in an average day, according to bitcoin wallet site blockchain.info. Still, its popularity is low compared with cash and credit cards. Besides Tesla, few companies have said they'll accept Bitcoin as payment. Overstock.com appears to accept Bitcoin for most listings on its website, including cameras, vacuums and clothes. PayPal allows its accountholders to buy, sell and hold four cryptocurrencies, including Bitcoin — but you can't use it to pay people, at least not yet. The payment company Square bought \$50 million worth of Bitcoin in October at about \$10,600 each, and allows users of its cash app to buy Bitcoin from their mobile devices. Lee Reiners, who teaches fintech and cryptocurrency courses at Duke University School of Law, believes many companies will remain hesitant to accept Bitcoin as payment for products and services because of the volatile price.

"If you were a merchant, why would you accept payment in an asset that could be worth 20% less a day after you receive it?" Reiners said in an email.

But Richard Lyons, a finance pro-

fessor at the University of California at Berkeley, predicts Bitcoin and other digital currencies "will become transactional currencies increasingly over the next five years. It's not going to happen overnight," he said.

WILL MORE COMPANIES INVEST IN BITCOIN?

Assuming Tesla bought Bitcoin at the volume weighted average price of \$34,445 in January, the company is sitting on a gain of about 38% with its investment. But in the regulatory announcement unveiling its Bitcoin purchase, Tesla warned it could suffer the loss of part or all of its investment "and our financial condition and operating results may be harmed."

"Tesla is going to have to be very careful and comprehensive in accounting for its Bitcoin investment on its books," said Anthony Michael Sabino, a professor of law, at St. John's University. "Like any other financial asset other than actual cash, it might fluctuate."

Mary Barra, CEO of General Motors, a Tesla rival, said GM has no immediate plans to invest in Bitcoin but would continue to "monitor and evaluate" potential use of digital currency.

IS BITCOIN A BUBBLE?

Reiners says that Bitcoin could potentially be a bubble, if you define one as people buying an asset for no reason other than the expectation that it will go up so they can sell at a profit. On the other hand, he said, there is consensus that Bitcoin has value as a hedge against inflation and the broader stock market.

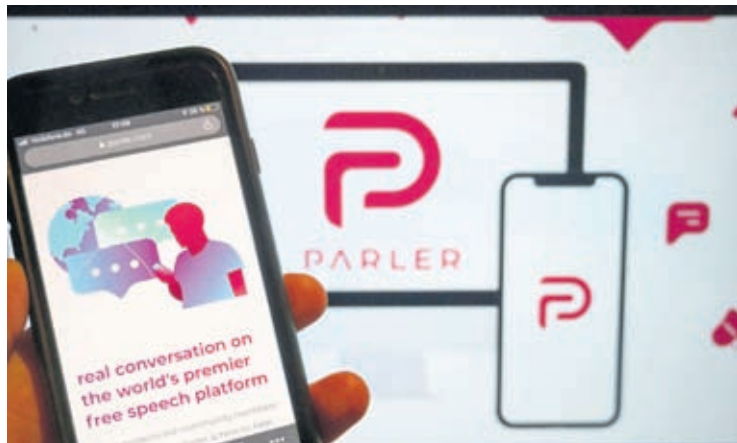
"All that said, I do think the Bitcoin bubble has plenty of room to inflate. Institutional money is just starting to get into the space and that's going to push the price higher. When this bubble bursts and at what price Bitcoin settles at is anyone's guess," Reiners said.

HOW BITCOIN CAME TO BE

It's a mystery. Bitcoin was launched in 2009 by a person or group of people operating under the name Satoshi Nakamoto. Bitcoin was then adopted by a small clutch of enthusiasts. Nakamoto dropped off the map as bitcoin began to attract widespread attention. But proponents say that doesn't matter: The currency obeys its own internal logic.

In 2016, An Australian entrepreneur stepped forward and claimed to be the founder of bitcoin, only to say days later that he did not "have the courage" to publish proof that he is. No one has claimed credit for the currency since. □

Associated Press



In this Jan. 10, 2021, file photo, the website of the social media platform Parler is displayed in Berlin.

Associated Press

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By Dave Green

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Right-wing friendly Parler announces re-launch

By **FRANK BAJAK**
AP Technology Writer

BOSTON (AP) — The right-wing friendly social network Parler, which was forced offline following the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol by supporters of then-President Donald Trump, says it is re-launching.

The Twitter alternative has been struggling to return online since Amazon stripped it of web-hosting service on Jan. 11 over its unwillingness to remove posts inciting violence. Google and Apple removed Parler's app from their online stores for the same reason.

Parler said in an emailed statement Monday that it would be led by an interim CEO, Mark Meckler of the Tea Party Patriots movement.

It said the service would be brought back online for current users this week with new users being able to sign up next week — and would not be reliant on "Big

Tech."

The site's homepage, however, was a single, static page whose lead post reminded viewers of "technical difficulties." While it was possible to log in via a different variation of that URL, Parler's iPhone app did not work, yielding a "networking error" when an Associated Press reporter tried it. Among new posters was Fox News personality Sean Hannity.

Guidelines accessible on the site, dated Feb. 14, said Parler would use technology and human review to remove "threatening or inciting content." They said a "community jury" headed by a Parler employee would hear appeals.

Parler was being hosted by a Los Angeles cloud services company, SkySilk. Ron Guilmette, a California-based internet researcher and activist, said SkySilk appeared to be a small outfit and that it was not clear to him whether it

could provide adequate security for the site. In particular, Guilmette cited the need for robust defense against denial-of-service attacks, which flood a site with data traffic to make it inaccessible. Such attacks are a threat to any major internet site — especially if their content is at all controversial.

SkySilk did not respond to questions about the level of support the company is providing.

Its CEO, Kevin Matossian, said in a statement that the company "does not advocate nor condone hate, rather it advocates the right to private judgment and rejects the role of being the judge, jury and executioner. Unfortunately, too many of our fellow technology providers seem to differ in their position on this subject."

Matossian added that his company applauded Parler's new community guidelines. □

Australia to amend laws to make Google and Facebook pay



In this Sept. 24, 2019, file photo a woman walks below a Google sign on the campus in Mountain View, Calif.

Associated Press

By **ROD MCGUIRK**
Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — Australia's government said on Tuesday it will amend draft laws that would make Google and Facebook pay for news to clarify that publishers would be paid in lump sums rather than per click on news article links. The legislative changes de-

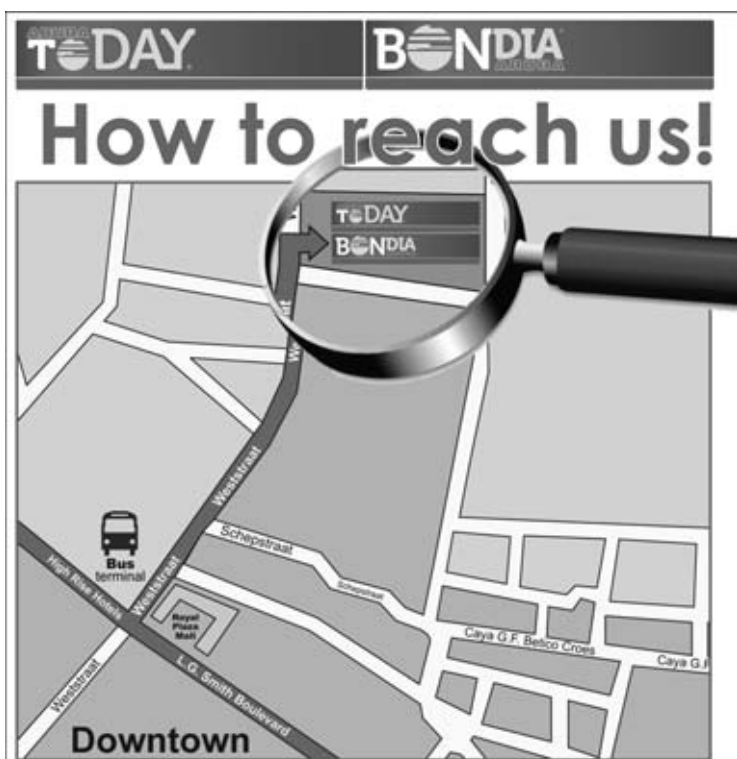
scribed in a government statement as "clarifications and technical amendments" follow Australian ministers' weekend discussions with Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg and Sundar Pichai, chief executive of Alphabet Inc. and its subsidiary Google. The conservative government hopes to enact the

so-called News Media Bargaining Code before the current session of Parliament ends on Feb. 25.

The amendments to be introduced to Parliament on Wednesday "improve the workability of the code while retaining its overall effect," Treasurer Josh Frydenberg and Communications Minister Paul Fletcher said in a joint statement.

The opposition center-left Labor Party agreed at a meeting of lawmakers on Tuesday to support the bill, guaranteeing its passage through the Senate where the government does not hold a majority of seats. But the government might have to compromise with further Senate amendments.

Australia Institute's Center for Responsible Technology, a think-tank that supports the proposed world-first legislation, accepted the proposed changes. □



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Kristen Wiig and Annie Mumolo go on a beach romp

By MARK KENNEDY
AP Entertainment Writer

There's a tiny oasis on the west coast of Florida where the men wear Tommy Bahama from head to toe and women of a certain age stroll around poolside in tube tops and full jewelry. It's a "middle-age Nirvana" where crabs talk and you can eat veal-stuffed manatee while wearing your evening culottes and sip tropical drinks served in a mini-aquarium. This oasis is called Vista Del Mar and it's the whacky invention of Kristen Wiig and Annie Mumolo, who co-wrote and co-star in "Barb and Star Go to Vista Del Mar," a gentle salute to women in their 40s getting their groove back.

Wiig and Mumolo, whose "Bridesmaids" was nominated for a screenwriting Oscar, are irresistible this time as two best friends who accidentally get wrapped up in a huge plot to destroy the Florida resort town. "Barb and Star Go to Vista Del Mar" has some pleasant messages — like don't abandon a friendship over a boy, fight to keep your inner shimmer and you're



This image released by Lionsgate shows Kristen Wiig, left, and Annie Mumolo in "Barb and Star Go to Vista Del Mar."

Associated Press

never too old to grow. It's not gross or sharp, unless you find jokes about how tourists like gifts made of shells a little too close to home. Wiig (Star) and Mumolo (Barb) play a particular caricature of a Midwestern woman — the hair is fluffy, they adore character socks and eat hot dog soup. Just a pair of very forgiving and kindly single gals from Soft

Rock, Nebraska. They are members of a Talking Club (run ruthlessly by Vanessa Bayer) and say things like, "It's so funny to think all the racoons in the world are sleeping right now." Somehow, the relentlessly optimistic pair don't get grating for viewers over its 100-minute run time. Director Josh Greenbaum's work is straightforward, wisely just letting these gals

do their thing. When their careers at a furniture store take a nose-dive, Barb and Star decide on a Florida vacation. "Maybe something is telling us to do something different," says Star to Barb. To which Barb replies: "Should we try those socks with individual toes?" In Florida, they wander into a revenge plot laid by a James Bond-like vil-

lain (also Wiig) who wants to destroy her hometown of Vista Del Mar with killer mosquitos because residents were mean to her as a kid. The tip-off that she's evil comes quickly; her lair has an elevator with a button labeled "Lair." There are roles for Jamie Dornan as a love interest, Damon Wayans Jr. as a bumbling spy, Reba McEntire as a water sprite and a hysterical turn by Andy García as Tommy Bahama, who delivers this line without cracking up: "It is time to mount the wind and ride it with the fierceness of a hippopotamus." Wiig and Mumolo are also behind many of the movie's songs, including the hotel lounge piano tune "I Love Boobies" and "Edgar's Prayer," which is delivered to seagulls. Of course, there are classic beach bum songs, too, like "Cheeseburger in Paradise" and "Key Largo." The film nicely sends up spy capers, Broadway and buddy movies and is a lot like its two leading characters: Kindly, a little silly and as sweet as a candy-colored drink at the pool bar. □

Johnny Pacheco, an idol in world of salsa, dies at age 85



In this Feb. 19, 2010 file photo, Dominican artist Johnny Pacheco poses for photographers on the red carpet as he goes in to record the Spanish language version of "We Are The World" (Somos el Mundo) with other top Latin music artists in Miami.

Associated Press

By SIGAL RATNER-ARIAS and BERENICE BAUTISTA
Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — Salsa idol Johnny Pacheco, who was a co-founder of Fania Records, Eddie Palmieri's bandmate and backer of music stars such as Rubén

Bladés, Willie Colón and Celia Cruz, died Monday. He was 85. He had been hospitalized in New York a few days earlier for pneumonia, his wife, María Elena "Cuqui" Pacheco, said on the artist's Facebook account.

Fania Records tweeted that the musician was "the man most responsible for the genre of salsa music. He was a visionary and his music will live on eternally." In a post on his social media, Blades said that "Pacheco leaves us with an important musical legacy, represented by all the collaborations he made during his distinguished career." Singer Marc Anthony lamented the loss of Pacheco, calling him "maestro of maestros" and a good friend. "Your sense of humor was contagious and I am forever grateful for your support, for the opportunity to be in your presence and for your amazing legacy," Anthony wrote. Pacheco was born March 25, 1935, in the Dominican Republic into a family of

musicians. In the 1940s the family moved to New York, where he taught himself to play accordion, violin, saxophone and clarinet and studied percussion at Juilliard. In 1954 he formed The Chuchulecos Boys with Palmieri on piano, Barry Rogers on trombone and other musicians who would gain renown in the salsa scene, such as Al Santiago, Mike Collazo and Ray Santos. But the life-changing moment came in 1963, when Pacheco partnered with attorney Jerry Masucci to found Fania Records. Pacheco was the music director, composer, arranger and producer, overseeing the label's genre of music that came to be known as salsa — a mixture of Cuban mambo, guaracha and chachachá, Puerto Rican rhythms and Dominican

meringue. He received the Latin Recording Academy Music Excellence Award in 2005 and was nominated for multiple Grammys and Latin Grammys. "His music and legacy will endure forever and continue to inspire music creators around the world," Gabriel Abaroa Jr., president and CEO of the Latin Recording Academy, said in a statement. Pacheco is survived by his wife and their four children. □

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Shiffrin close to male skiers on same course at worlds

By ANDREW DAMPF

AP Sports Writer

CORTINA D'AMPEZZO, Italy

(AP) — No woman came close to matching Mikaela Shiffrin on Monday. Not many men, either, for that matter.

The American skier dominated the combined race at the world championships to such a degree that she pondered how she stacked up against the opposite gender.

And for once — with men and women racing on the same course on the same day in the super-G part of the race — there was a direct comparison.

Shiffrin's time in the super-G leg was third best among the women and would have placed her slightly more than two seconds behind men's halfway leader James Crawford of Canada — but ahead of American teammate Jared Goldberg, who had a wild run down the Olympia delle Tofane course.

"There's a big difference between men and women skiing. But when we can get sort of close to that and on days like today with this perfect, smooth conditions and just full attack, then it's cool to find a comparison," Shiffrin said.

While the men and women raced on exactly the same super-G course, the slalom leg for the men was slightly more challenging — it contained more gates and thus more turns.

But the snow surface for both men and women in the slalom was the same — injected with water to the point where it resembled a sheet of sheer ice.

Shiffrin dug her sharp edges into the hard surface with apparent ease as she danced between the gates to post the fastest slalom leg in the women's race — more than a half-second ahead of silver medalist Petra Vlhova.

In the final standings, Vlhova (0.86 seconds behind) and bronze medalist Michelle Gisin (0.89) were the only skiers within two seconds of Shiffrin's combined time.

"Dominant" was the word



United States' Mikaela Shiffrin competes during the slalom portion of the women's combined race, at the alpine ski World Championships, in Cortina d'Ampezzo, Italy, Monday, Feb. 15, 2021.

Associated Press

that Tiger Shaw, the president and CEO of U.S. Ski and Snowboard, used to describe Shiffrin's performance.

"Look at how fast she was in the super-G and then racing the slalom as usual," Shaw said.

Super-G leader Federica Brignone lost her grip and fell at the third gate of the slalom. Two-time defending world champion Wendy Holdener also failed to finish the second leg. Likewise in the men's race, 2017 world champion Luca Aerni was among those who failed to finish the slalom leg.

Austria's Marco Schwarz narrowly edged Alexis Pinot for gold while Loic Meillard took bronze despite finishing more than a second out.

So where might Shiffrin have finished in the men's race? Well, it's an inexact science, but Shiffrin required 45.05 seconds to

clear the 57 turning gates of the women's slalom course. Add in the three more turning gates on the men's course, the equivalent of a 5.26% increase, and it translates to an extra 2.37 seconds.

That would have placed Shiffrin ninth overall in the men's race.

"There's a lot of talented girls skiing. I'm not surprised," Kjetil Jansrud, the five-time Olympic medalist from Norway, said of the two-second gap between men and women after the super-G leg.

"Then again, two seconds on this course is quite a lot of time, because — well,

it always is in skiing — but if there was anyone out there that thought the ladies would be like 10 seconds off, I could have already told them yesterday that that was wrong."

Before injuries curtailed her career, Lindsey Vonn had campaigned for years for the right to race in downhill against men.

She was one of the few female skiers to use longer men's skis.

Vonn wanted to race against the men at the World Cup stop in Lake Louise, Alberta, where she won a record 18 times. The course in Cortina, where Vonn won 12 times, might

have sufficed, too.

As American downhiller Bryce Bennett noted, the Cortina course doesn't have enough features on it to "separate" the men from the women, compared to more challenging tests in Kitzbühel, Austria, and Bormio.

"You can just arc as hard as you can," Bennett said. "It's a full sprint top to bottom. There's nothing in your way of braking. It's just 'hammer.' It is what it is."

Shiffrin was charging so hard in the super-G that she nearly crashed into the finish banner.

"Everything just felt so nice," Shiffrin said. "It was just maybe a couple spots where I felt like I was enjoying the turns too much and forgetting to get in my tuck. ... I almost missed the finish."

Having already collected a bronze in super-G last week, the victory gave Shiffrin an American-record nine career medals at worlds — one more than Vonn.

She also became the first skier — man or woman — to win gold medals at five straight worlds.

"When I was a little girl and I wanted to be the best in the world. I wrote in my diary, 'I want to be the best skier in the world,'" Shiffrin said. "What does that mean? It's a lot of hard work. It's a lot of sacrifice and dedication."

Shiffrin also set an American record with her sixth world championship title, breaking a tie with Ted Ligety, who retired last week. She has four golds in slalom and one in super-G from previous worlds and is among the main contenders in slalom and giant slalom later this week.

"Fifteen years later, 10 years after I started racing on the World Cup," Shiffrin said, "It's incredible to look back at everything." □



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Serena tops Halep at Australian Open, sets up Osaka showdown



Serbia's Novak Djokovic serves to Germany's Alexander Zverev during their quarterfinal match at the Australian Open tennis championship in Melbourne, Australia, Wednesday, Feb. 17, 2021.

Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Serena Williams was not pleased with the way her play suddenly was slipping in the Australian Open quarterfinals.

After one mistake against No. 2 seed Simona Halep — who won the last time they played each other — Williams pointed at her racket strings and made a sour face, as if to indicate it wasn't her fault. After another, Williams looked up at her guest box with palms up and asked, "What is happening?"

That dismay didn't last long. Williams recalibrated her shots with the help of terrific footwork, overcame 33 unforced errors and claimed the last five games, beating Halep 6-3, 6-3 Tuesday to return to the final four at Melbourne Park for the first time since she won the tournament in 2017. That was her most recent Grand Slam title.

"I just realized I was making a lot of unforced errors in those games that I lost. And I knew that I had an opportunity to play better," said Williams, now two wins away from claiming her record-tying 24th major singles championship. "So I was just like, 'Just stay in there. You just can keep going.' And that's what I just did."

She set up a showdown against No.

3 Naomi Osaka, a three-time Slam champ who will carry a 19-match winning streak into Thursday's semifinals.

"She's Serena," Osaka said. "I feel really intimidated when I see her on the other side of the court."

This will be their fourth matchup; the most memorable, of course, was Osaka's victory in the 2018 U.S. Open final.

On that night, Williams got into an argument with the chair umpire after her coach, Patrick Mouratoglou, was caught trying to relay a signal — that's not allowed in Grand Slam play — and wound up being docked a game. Osaka's win closed with thousands of fans filling Arthur Ashe Stadium with boos, and both of the athletes in tears during the trophy ceremony. "We both have had closure," Williams said, "and we have reached out to each other."

There were no spectators Tuesday in Rod Laver Arena, because they've been banned from the tournament during a five-day government lockdown in response to a local rise in COVID-19 cases (the applause and other crowd noise TV viewers hear is added to the broadcast feed and isn't actually happening in the stadium).

Displaying the improved movement that Mouratoglou says has been a point of emphasis and Williams says is a result of a problematic left Achilles tendon finally healing, the 39-year-old American covered the court impeccably. She stretched points with defense or swung at balls while they were still on the rise, trying to take time away from Halep.

"I know that, throughout my career, speed has been one thing that's been super good in my game," Williams said.

Plenty was super good in the first set. Serves at up to 124 mph (200 kph). Returns that included a cross-court forehand winner on Halep's very first service point, a stinging shot about which Williams said with a chuckle: "I just saw it, and it looked like a donut, and I went for it."

Then the miscues started mounting — a double-fault here, a wild volley there — and Williams trailed 2-0, then 3-1 in the second set.

But she put a stop to that slide. A key moment came at 3-all, when Williams earned her sixth break chance of the game by taking a 21-stroke exchange that ended with a wide forehand from Halep. Williams converted that break on a

13-shot point in which she ran wide of the doubles alley for a forehand that extended things until Halep dumped a forehand into the net.

"My feeling after this match is that I was not that far," two-time major champ Halep said, "but also: She was stronger in the important moments."

Williams is 0-4 in Grand Slam finals since her last championship. One of those defeats came against Osaka at Flushing Meadows. Another came at Wimbledon in 2019 against Halep, who made an unheard-of total of three unforced errors in a performance she described as "the best day, actually, of my life."

If Williams is going to get No. 24 on Saturday, she could end up needing to have beaten each of the top three players in the rankings: Halep, Osaka and, perhaps in the final, No. 1 Ash Barty, whose quarterfinal against No. 25 Karolina Muchova is Wednesday.

The other remaining quarterfinal is between two Americans, No. 22 Jennifer Brady and unseeded Jessica Pegula.

In men's action, 114th-ranked qualifier Aslan Karatsev of Russia became the first man in the professional era to get to the semifinals in his first Grand Slam appearance, defeating No. 18 seed Grigor Dimitrov 2-6, 6-4, 6-1, 6-2. His degree of difficulty will increase against his next opponent, top-ranked Novak Djokovic.

Defending champion Djokovic fended off sixth-seeded Alexander Zverev 6-7 (6), 6-2, 6-4, 7-6 (6) in a night match to reach the Australian Open semifinals for the ninth time. He has never lost at Melbourne Park after making it to the last four.

Osaka overpowered 71st-ranked Hsieh Su-wei of Taiwan 6-2, 6-2, helped by serves that reached 122 mph (196 kph). She delivered seven aces, claimed 23 of 25 first-serve points and wound up with 24 total winners to just 14 unforced errors.

At 35, Hsieh used her tricky, two-handed shots off both sides to become the oldest woman in the professional era to make her Grand Slam quarterfinal debut. But she was no match for Osaka, who knew what was potentially in the offing with a victory.

"Normally I never look at my draw," Osaka said.

"But everyone has told me about my draw here, so I kind of had no choice but to know who my next opponent is. It's definitely going to be really fun." □